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Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7943rd meeting
Thursday, 18 May 2017, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Rosselli	(Uruguay)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Kandeel
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Kawamura
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Ms. Sison

Agenda

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Letter dated 28 April 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/379)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Letter dated 28 April 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/379)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Valentin Inzko, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. João Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/379, which contains a letter dated 28 April 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, transmitting the fifty-first report of the High Representative for Implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I now give the floor to Mr. Inzko.

Mr. Inzko (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a privilege to be here today to brief the Security Council on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country in which the international community's commitment and unity remains crucial to achieving our shared goal, which is none other than sustainable peace and security in the Balkans.

(*spoke in English*)

These are special days for Bosnia and Herzegovina, as it will celebrate on 22 May the twenty-fifth anniversary of its admission as a full-fledged State Member of the United Nations, along with Croatia and Slovenia. But these days are also special for my home country, Austria, as it was presiding the Security Council in the month of May 1992, exactly 25 years ago. The Ambassador of Austria at that time, Mr. Peter Hohenfellner, as President of the Security Council, on 20 May 1992 (see S/PV.3079) proposed that the Council adopt a decision recommending to the General Assembly that Bosnia and Herzegovina be admitted to the United Nations. At the same meeting, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 755 (1992), endorsing that recommendation. Upon that historic recommendation, Bosnia and Herzegovina was admitted under General Assembly resolution 46/237, adopted without a vote, 25 years ago, on 22 May 1992, as a Member of the United Nations.

I wish to use this occasion to congratulate Bosnia and Herzegovina wholeheartedly, and I am very glad that — as predicted 25 years ago — Bosnia and Herzegovina has made a significant contribution to the work of the Organization, most recently with its successful tenure as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, as well as — and I stress this — with its peacekeeping forces worldwide.

As this is my first opportunity to do so, I would also like to take a moment to express my sincere and heartfelt condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of Ambassador Vitaly Ivanovich Churkin, who had such a dramatic impact on the work of the Council over many years. He was also involved in the talks on the former Yugoslavia as Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation.

When we speak of Bosnia and Herzegovina, we should also keep in mind what has happened over the past six months. I must say that Bosnia and Herzegovina has maintained its commitment to making progress along the path of Euro-Atlantic integration, while also continuing to face internal challenges to its sustainable stability and advancement.

On the positive side, the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities formally received the European Union (EU) questionnaire in December, and the adaptation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU took place that same month. I wholeheartedly welcomed both developments and have consistently called upon the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities at all levels to maintain their focus on the EU agenda.

I would also like to take this opportunity to commend the efforts of the EU, under the capable leadership of

its Special Representative Lars-Gunnar Wigemark, towards assisting the Bosnian authorities in achieving their aspirations to integration with the Union. Equally significant are the efforts of Enlargement Commissioner Hahn and of High Representative Federica Mogherini, who has invited the Balkan leaders to an important regional meeting in Brussels next week.

Equally encouraging was the consensus and forward-looking pragmatism demonstrated during the reporting period by the Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidency in adopting the so-called defence review of military forces last November — an issue which had been outstanding for quite some time. This is one of the requirements for Bosnia and Herzegovina in its efforts to participate in the NATO membership action plan.

On the regional level, bilateral cooperation and overall reconciliation between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia have continued to improve, in large part due to the committed engagement of Serbian Prime Minister and soon to be President Aleksandar Vučić, and also through the efforts of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers Chair Denis Zvizdić. Good cooperation between Sarajevo and Belgrade, and also between Sarajevo and Zagreb, has manifested itself through joint Government sessions and through the visit of Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković to Mostar.

Despite all these positive developments, Bosnia and Herzegovina has also seen some significant challenges over the past six months. First and foremost was the political controversy between Bosniak political representatives and Serb political parties over whether Bosnia and Herzegovina should submit a request for revision of the International Court of Justice 2007 Judgment in the genocide case of *Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro*. This issue split Bosniak and Serb parties and officials within the state-level coalition to an extent not seen for many years, delaying progress. Two different legal interpretations on whether the Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidency needed to renew the mandate of the Bosnian agent to the Court before submitting such a request proved to be irreconcilable, increasing tensions within the Presidency.

The now former agent of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the International Court of Justice, Sakib Softić submitted the request for revision to the Court, which later proved to be even more controversial when it came to light that the Court had already notified him that a renomination of the agent by the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities would be needed. The situation was ultimately resolved when the Court made its decision on the non-admissibility of the request, but the overall dynamic whereby leading politicians focus disproportionately on ethnically divisive issues, while showing little urgency in addressing the need for real reforms, is a serious cause for concern.

The second negative trend during the reporting period surrounded the activities of the Republika Srpska authorities to implement their unconstitutional referendum, including ostentatious celebrations of the 9 January holiday, with the participation of some Serb members of the Bosnia and Herzegovina armed forces.

In addition, during the reporting period, some Croat politicians intensified calls for the federalization of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was understood by some to imply the further ethnic division of the country into three to four federal units, one of which would have a Croat majority.

Increasingly, the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina appear unable to act even in their own self-interest in a win-win situation, for instance in addressing the commitments made under the International Monetary Fund (IMF) arrangement with Bosnia and Herzegovina. The continued failure to meet the IMF prior actions for the completion of the first quarterly review will hold back significant international assistance to the country's fiscal stability and economic development. In that regard, I would like to express my praise and support for Francisco Parodi, IMF Resident Representative to Bosnia and Herzegovina, for the ongoing efforts of the IMF to encourage meaningful structural reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Furthermore, the situation with regard to rule of law in the country continues to deteriorate. Corruption is a serious problem, and continued challenges to state-level institutions, including the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court and the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, contribute to the further weakening of the rule of law.

Finally, during the past six months, the frequency and intensity of the Republika Srpska President's public remarks advocating for secession have lessened, although the independent status of Republika Srspka remains part of his party's official platform, and only

this week he publically expressed his certainty that such an independence referendum will eventually take place.

The lessening of such rhetoric follows the imposition of financial and travel sanctions against the Republika Srpska President by the United States. This reaffirms to me that we, as an international community, can have an impact when we are ready to send a strong message to authorities and leaders who openly reject the rule of law and reopen the wounds of the past that they are leading themselves and their constituencies into isolation.

In sharp contrast to divisive rhetoric are the efforts of high-school students in the historic city of Jajce, who, with their determination and perseverance, prevented the partition of their high school based on ethnic segregation, as planned by some political parties. Equally encouraging is today's news from Srebrenica, where Bosniaks and Serbs, Muslims and Orthodox students, are celebrating together their graduation from high school. They have stressed that we are all human beings and that, with their common festivities, they wish to demonstrate their mutual respect and desire for reconciliation. The students said that this is the latest and most realistic message out of Srebrenica. They have stressed unity, love and a common future. This is, of course, a good message.

Looking ahead, Bosnia and Herzegovina will have its next general election in the autumn of 2018. With the difficult period surrounding the International Court of Justice crisis and the celebration of Republika Srpska Day over, political discussions in Bosnia and Herzegovina will now most likely focus on amendments to the national election law. Thus far, no consensus has been reached on this issue, which has the potential to create a new political stalemate in the country.

Keeping in mind that some 18 months remain before the elections, I would strongly encourage the current authorities to make the most of the forthcoming period and demonstrate to voters that they are able to look past divisive issues and deliver meaningful reforms to improve the economic situation in the entities and throughout the country. Foremost on this list should be the economic reforms demanded by the country's international creditors, as well as EU-related issues, in order to open the early possibility of future EU candidate status for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I also expect the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, foremost the parties represented in the State Parliament, to finally resolve the legislative vacuum that has prevented citizens in Mostar from electing local representatives since 2012. That will require compromise on all sides and willingness to resolve issues pragmatically.

Finally, it is simply unfathomable that, more than seven years after the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the current electoral system discriminates against individuals that do not belong to one of Bosnia and Herzegovina's three constituent peoples, a considerable number of citizens are still denied the basic right to run for public office on the basis of ethnicity. The authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina must correct the discrimination identified in the *Sejdic-Finci* case and in related cases as a priority.

Six months ago (see S/PV.7803) I described two parallel trends in Bosnia and Herzegovina — positive advancement in Euro-Atlantic integration and a negative tendency to flout the rule of law and focus on divisive backward-looking issues. With the continued support of the international community, the elected representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina can make progress and ensure that the first trend becomes the dominant one, but they will need to refocus their attention.

In the meantime, the international community should retain all the instruments at hand. We need to be mindful of the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a complex political and security environment where negative scenarios can quickly endanger the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the progress achieved after Dayton. For that reason, I am firmly convinced that there is still a need to maintain the EU military force on the ground with an executive military mandate, and I fully support its extension in November, when it is reviewed by the Security Council.

The European Union Force is a relatively inexpensive but necessary investment in peace and stability in the Balkans. In my view, it provides an essential baseline of physical and psychological security that supports the EU, my Office and other international organizations in our pursuit of our common goal of sustainable peace and prosperity for Bosnia and Herzegovina and its people. Recent scenes witnessed in the Parliament of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia remind us of how quickly an incident can escalate in the Balkan countries.

Despite the progress Bosnia and Herzegovina has made in the past two years in its pursuit of EU candidate-country status, the country still faces fundamental challenges. As we enter the third decade of peace implementation, it cannot be assumed that Bosnia and Herzegovina is on a glide path to a peaceful, viable State that is irreversibly on course towards European integration.

I thank the international community for their continued attention and commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is necessary, but insufficient to deliver the changes needed to bring Bosnians and Herzegovinians greater prosperity, stability and membership in Euro-Atlantic institutions. Only the leaders and institutions can do that. But we can — and in my view we must — continue to offer institutional support and a vision based on integration and functionality.

In addition we must be firm in upholding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while providing a framework of stability and respect for the Peace Agreement. In those things, our commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina and its wonderful and talented people remains unwavering.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Inzko for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We thank High Representative Inzko for his substantial report (S/2017/379, annex). Our delegation would like to refer to some key salient points and make some observations and recommendations.

Obviously, we see progress, but there are some areas that need close monitoring. The recent developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina must continue to receive attention. Bosnia and Herzegovina remains a country in transition. It needs the support of all if it is to become a nation with strong State institutions with inclusive dialogue in its democratic procedures and trust in progress and normalization. We urge all parties to the Peace Agreement to comply with all procedures and institutions that are integral components of that settlement, including the Constitutional Court.

Kazakhstan reiterates its commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which in turn has demonstrated its strong commitment to implementing its reform agenda — focused on security, stability, democracy and socioeconomic development. We welcome positive ongoing dialogue between the Governments of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia — with regular contact at very high levels — and we welcome the results of the meeting held in Belgrade in January. We encourage them to carry those results forward.

The European Union (EU) Force must also focus on converting defence properties into State and civilian structures, greater fiscal responsibility and sustainability, strengthening the Parliamentary Assembly and developing media and broadcasting communication. The country needs further support in order to improve its energy system and infrastructure, foreign trade, economic relations and other areas of socioeconomic development. The question of returning refugees and displaced persons and their resettlement must also be addressed. More needs to be done to improve the daily lives of the citizens and to promote reconciliation.

The progress achieved on the EU integration track will catalyse reconciliation and resolve long-standing issues while addressing the various reforms. It is equally important for the political leadership to demonstrate responsibility and accountability. The strong engagement of the international community is an obvious necessity for the sustainable development of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and must include measures to improve housing, education and health care, and promote gender equality with the active involvement of civil society.

Bosnia and Herzegovina also needs international support to fight corruption, terrorism and organized crime. In that regard, Kazakhstan welcomes the initiatives aimed at combating violent extremist activities, including the training of Da'esh fighters, as well as the reintegration of such fighters into the community. A good example is the strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina on preventing and combating of terrorism for the 2015-2020 period. The strategy seeks to protect the rule of law, good governance and human rights, in order to maintain peace, security and stability in the region. Given its impact on European stability, that work should be followed closely by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the EU, the European Union Force and NATO.

Finally, the international community should support Bosnia and Herzegovina's move towards stability for inclusiveness in the political success of the country and fostering ethnic harmony in cooperation on national programmes. Ultimately, we must reach a stage of stability, while overseeing the implementation of the civilian aspects of the Peace Agreement, which will demonstrate a new level of peace and prosperity.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We listened very carefully to the briefing by the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Valentin Inzko. We also thoroughly reviewed his report (S/2017/379, annex) and must say once again, as was the case on other occasions, that the document does not provide an objective narrative of the country. It is a one-sided account with politicized assessments. We call upon Mr. Inzko to change his credo and to stop blaming the Bosnian Serbs — and recently Croats — for all the difficulties. Instead, he must focus on moving towards dialogue based on mutual respect that takes into account the needs and concerns of all.

In the course of recent months, the internal political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina deteriorated and culminated in a very deep constitutional crisis at the end of February. That resulted from the attempts of politicians in Sarajevo to carry out a review of the 2007 verdict of the International Court of Justice in the case *Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro*. We would like to underscore that these steps bypassed the Presidency as well as other pan-Bosnian structures, thereby undermining their efficiency and authority. This represents a very alarming trend in the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This is weakening the trend of having a mutually respectful dialogue, compromise and consensus among all constituent entities on all theimportant issues. Let us not forget that this principle forms the letter and the spirit of the Dayton Agreement. It is the basis and the foundation of national reconciliation, as well as a gauge and a guarantee of stability and security in the country and in the region as a whole.

In the meantime, the Dayton Agreement and its key basic principles are being attacked; this did not begin just recently. Let us recall the situation that prevailed in the summer of 2016, when the results of the census were announced and the well-founded objections of Bosnian Serbs were ignored. Let us also recall the trials and tribulations surrounding the ruling of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina that it was unlawful to celebrate Republika Srpska Day on 9 January. This one-sided, politicized decision compelled the Bosnian Serb authorities to resort to the highest form of democracy: the free expression of the will of citizens. The recommendational nature of the results of the referendum was underscored in the recent Republic Srpska report to the Secretary-General.

As a result, the decision was made to introduce changes into the law on Republika Srpska's main holiday. This decision was not questioned. We did not agree with the statement that celebrating Republika Srpska Day had caused the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina or the Republika Srpska to deteriorate. This is not borne out by the facts, and there have been no negative consequences. The conclusions reached about the concerns of the Bosniaks who live in Republika Srpska, including refugees, are simply made up and have nothing to do with reality.

The situation in Republika Srpska can be characterized as stable and sustainable, including in Srebrenica, to which special attention is being paid by the international community. There is no justification, therefore, for the one-sided sanctions introduced last year by the former United States Administration against Republika Srpska. This decision needs to be rescinded.

Unfortunately, we cannot speak of stability and sustainability in connection with Bosnian institutions and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition to the provocative attempt to review the decision of the International Court of Justice, it is also dangerous that a number of leaders are not ready to agree on key issues relating to equality for the representatives of all ethnicities in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Chronic issues are facing Mostar, where elections have not been held since 2008, and the implementation of the European Court of Human Rights ruling on *Sejdić and Finci*. In addition, the issue of introducing changes to the electoral law relating to legislative elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina is problematic. We are convinced, and let me underscore this point once again, that the electoral law must reflect the interests of all three constituent entities of the country, which is the basic philosophy of Dayton. The key to contemporary political issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina lies in the fact that the level of inter-ethnic trust is low, a trend to which we need to pay special attention, as does the

High Representative, because he represents the entire international community, not just a part of it.

We need to stop appointing guilty parties. Once again we need to work on promoting dialogue. We must stop telling untruthful stories about separatist tendencies in Banja Luka and inventing negative trends with respect to Republika Srpska. The President of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik, in his most recent report to the Secretary-General, countered all such accusations. It would be useful to cite excerpts from this official document in the report of the High Representative.

Given the current political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we see no danger to regional stability. However, the evolution of some processes following a negative scenario with the involvement of external forces, including extremist andterrorist forces, could make the situation into a source of concern. Unfortunately, the High Representative has paid minimal attention to the important topic of the spread of extremist religious teachings in Bosnia and Herzegovina. But this is something that exists, and the international community must monitor the situation very closely.

The quality and depth of the analysis contained in the High Representative's report leaves a lot to be desired. Once again, we see a biased attitude towards Serbs, as well as unacceptable comparisons and historic parallels, for which the High Representative will have to apologize later. Mr. Inzko spent more than a decade in the region, so he should not make those kinds of allegations. It is not entirely clear from the report how exactly the High Representative is helping in the implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina of the 5+2 agenda, on the drawdown of the Office of the High Representative. There has been no progress in that respect; the spectrum of preconditions and criteria is so wide that we cannot count in its implementation happening anytime soon. Instead, Mr. Inzko is very fond of promoting the Euro-Atlantic agenda. This is not his mandate. He is a representative of the entire international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In the current conditions, we see no added value in the remaining elements of the international presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We support the closing of the Office of the High Representative drawing down his the Bonn powers as quickly as possible, because they have outlived their usefulness, as have the protectorate methods. They do not help national reconciliation but impede the harmonious development of the country as a whole.

Russia, as one of the guarantors of the Dayton Peace Agreement will continue firmly promoting the stabilization process in Bosnia and Herzegovina, abiding very strictly by the Dayton Agreement. It is unacceptable to try to review its principles, which are enshrined in Security Council resolutions. We are committed to transferring full responsibility for the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina to Bosnians themselves. All changes must come about as a result of a conscious choice by the Bosnian side and be carried out strictly in line with the consensus provided for in the Dayton agreement.

We are interested in the development of a mutually beneficial cooperation in Bosnia and its entities and ensuring that there is true equality for all three constituent entities in the country.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I thank High Representative Inzko for his update on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Office of the High Representative has played an essential role over 22 years to help Bosnia and Herzegovina move towards peace and prosperity and to secure the stability of the region as a whole.

I want to express our sincere thanks to High Representative Inzko for his tireless efforts and convey our strong support for his mandate as the final authority under the Dayton Agreement with regard to the interpretation of the civilian implementation of the peace agreement.

The United States remains dedicated to upholding the Dayton Peace Accords, maintaining the sovereignty and territorial Integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina and promoting its continued development and integration. We commend Bosnia and Herzegovina's progress towards those goals and integration with Euro-Atlantic institutions. The completion of the defence review in November, continued progress towards NATO standards, the registration of defence properties and the work with European Union are all positive steps.

Continued progress towards integration with both NATO and the European Union, however, will require vision, political will and real follow-through on commitments, but, for Bosnia and Herzegovina to achieve its full potential, it will have to resolve long-

standing political issues. Bosnia and Herzegovina must continue diligently to enhance the rule of law, address corruption and improve the overall political climate in the country for the benefit of all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is particularly important to address reforms now before campaigning for the 2018 elections begins.

We share the concerns voiced by High Representative Inzko about the actions of anyone who seeks to erode state-level institutions whether by ignoring the decisions of the Constitutional Court and acting outside the established decision-making process or advocating for further divisions of Bosnia and Herzegovina. United States sanctions against Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik should be a warning to those who seek to undermine the stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The United States reiterates its strong support for ongoing efforts to make sure that Bosnia and Herzegovina fully implement the Dayton Peace Agreement. We anticipate the day when we can say with absolute confidence that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a peaceful, viable State irreversibly on course for European integration. We are not there yet, but look forward to Bosnia and Herzegovina meeting the objectives and conditions established by the Peace Implementation Council for the closure of the Office of the High Representative. We encourage Bosnia and Herzegovina's leaders and all members of the international community to support the actions and reforms needed to reach that milestone. Until that time, the international community must deliver on its commitment to provide all necessary support and funding to the Office of the High Representative to fulfil its mandate and goals for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): Let me join others in welcoming back Mr. Inzko to the Security Council and thanking him for his report (S/2017/379, annex) and briefing. He has the United Kingdom's continued support in his role as High Representative. We are grateful for all the work that he does for Bosnia and Herzegovina and its people.

Looking back over the reporting period, it is clear that 2017 was full of promise for Boznia and Herzegovina. The path to accession to the European Union (EU) lay ahead — finally unblocked after years of inertia — and the reform agenda had begun to deliver the jobs and growth for which so many cried out when they took to the streets in 2014. Yet as the High Representative's report makes clear, narrow interests, whether personal or political, have instead set back progress this year and dampened the prospects and potential of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

On too many occasions this year, Bosnia's leaders returned to the divisions of the past instead of delivering for the future. Those setbacks have only served to distract attention away from much needed progress on the reform agenda embodying reforms that would promote greater security stability and prosperity across the country. We clearly saw that in the celebrations in the Republika Srpska on 9 January.

The referendum on the national debt was in clear defiance of the Bosnian Constitutional Court's authority and a direct challenge to the Dayton Peace Agreement. The participation of Serb members of the Bosnian armed forces raised tensions even further and underscored the urgent need to implement the defence review. Furthermore, the continued efforts of Bosnian Croat politicians to advocate for electoral reform this year have also distracted attention from the reform agenda and much needed socioeconomic reforms. We have seen economic legislation blocked and delayed because leaders have chosen to act in the interests of one of the constituent peoples and not in the interest of all of Bosnia and Herzegovina's people.

Finally, we have seen the Bosniak member of the Presidency undermine trust in the ruling coalition by unilaterally and unsuccessfully launching a revision of the legal case accusing Serbia of complicity in war-time genocide. That sort of backward-looking and divisive politicking has no place in 2017.

There is still time for Bosnia and Herzegovina's leaders to deliver this year. Through the reform agenda, they have a clear map charting the way ahead. It is a path that will lead to growth and stability, but one that needs renewed commitment and engagement. It is a path that remains central to Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU membership — an aspiration shared by so many across the country. It remains, however, a path not yet taken, and that has not been without cost. More than $75 million dollars of International Monetary Fund (IMF) funding was delayed late last week by the failure to adopt the law on excise duties. More than $1 billion of further IMF funding now at risk.

As my Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, made clear during his visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina last month, it is long past tim. for Bosnia and Herzegovina's

leaders to work together so as to deliver the reforms that would enable the country to compete and thrive in the modern global economy. During the past recent months, we have seen that they can find common ground. The successful repeat elections in Stolac show that the authorities can deliver for the people. But it is also clear that, until national interests trump narrow interests, stability in Bosnia will not be entrenched and all concerns about the political and security situation will remain, because continued divisive rhetoric and repeated political crises only put pressure on the country and distract from much needed reforms.

We therefore share the High Representative's assessment that the European Union-led peacekeeping force with an executive mandate remains vital. Accordingly, we will support the retention of that crucial asset when its mandate is up for renewal in November.

Mr. Cardi (Italy): I would like to thank the High Representative for his briefing and reiterate our support for his work.

Italy aligns itself with the statement to be made later on behalf of the European Union.

At the outset, allow me to emphasize that the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina is in the European Union. The country has made significant steps forward during the past year, thereby demonstrating its ability to find unity of intent and capacity to embark upon difficult but necessary structural reforms. The reform agenda, which was developed with the assistance of the European Union and international financial institutions, has outlined the key areas of action to trigger development and consolidate the stability of the country. Nevertheless, the recent failure to adapt key legislative reforms required by the International Monetary Fund risks jeopardizing the results achieved.

We call on all institutions and political forces to stay committed to the reform process and maintain momentum towards the fulfilment of political and economic goals. Such reforms are needed, first and foremost by, the people. The political leadership will be held accountable based on the results that it delivers to its citizens.

I underscore that the reform agenda has paved the way for the country to present a formal request of accession to the European Union. We look forward to the finalization of the questionnaire of the European Commission and encourage the authorities to keep this goal in focus and achieve it through efficient coordination of all institutional levels.

This is indeed a crucial time for Bosnia and Herzegovina. For that reason, we urge all institutions and political forces to refrain from raising issues that could divert attention from the reform agenda and the European track. Recent political tensions must be set aside. Any dispute should be addressed through frank and inclusive dialogue and by abiding fully with the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in full respect for and cooperation with the institutions established therein, starting with the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We expect that the discussion on the Election Law will be addressed as much as possible in a consensual way, without endangering the institutional architecture, and with the aim of establishing a functional legal framework for the elections in autumn 2018. At the same time, it is important to consider how the need for institutional reform represents an important step that Bosnia will be called on to fully accomplish in the future in the perspective of the European integration path.

Ethnic divisions are still entrenched in Bosnian society. We call on all the authorities to tackle them and to focus on the many needs of the Bosnian people. The citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially the youngest, do not need divisive rhetoric. They deserve concrete opportunities to build the future in their own country. They want to be recognized as enjoying the same rights and freedoms as all European citizens. From outside, we will continue to provide support along with the European Union.

Secondly, I would like to add that the regional dimension is of the utmost importance. Integration and cooperation among Western Balkan countries is key to their stabilization and development and conducive to their European path. It will strengthen mutual confidence, improve connectivity and freedom of movement, develop the private sector and encourage youth mobility. That is true especially for Bosnia and Herzegovina. As Chair of the Western Balkan process in 2017, Italy is engaged in a fruitful dialogue with all Western Balkan countries to identify with them their priorities to boost regional integration. Bosnia and Herzegovina is actively contributing, as it has already proved by hosting a regional summit last March in preparation of the annual Western Balkan summit that Italy will host in Trieste on 12 July. We are committed

to making this entire process meaningful and beneficial to these countries. In a few days, on 24 May, we will host another preparatory ministerial meeting in Rome.

In conclusion, our support to Bosnia and Herzegovina is driven by respect for its sovereignty and territorial integrity, as enshrined in the Dayton Peace Agreement; our full support to the European Union-led peacekeeping force Althea, authorized by the Council; and our staunch commitment to accompanying the path Bosnia and Herzegovina has chosen towards the European Union. In that regard, we urge the country to redouble its efforts to take forward the 5+2 agenda established by the Peace Implementation Council for the closure of the Office of High Representative and to steadily advance in approaching the European Union.

As the country's stability continues to strengthen and further progress is achieved on reforms and on the European Union path, we look forward to continuing, in the appropriate forum, the discussion with the international community on the possible reconfiguration of the international presence.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): We, too, align ourselves with the statement to be made by the Head of the Delegation of the European Union (EU).

I should like to thank the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr Valentin Inzko, for his briefing this morning and for the work he and his team are doing on the ground. Mr Inzko is the seventh High Representative since the creation of the Office under the Dayton Accords 22 years ago. When Carl Bildt was appointed as the first High Representative in 1995, he said that

> "the history of the conflict in Bosnia — as well as in all of the former Yugoslavia — is the history of the most flagrant violations of human rights we have seen in recent European history".

Despite the fact that challenges still remain, High Representative Inzko's briefing today underlines the remarkable progress that Bosnia and Herzegovina has made since then. This has happened thanks to the efforts and support of successive High Representatives and the international community, not least the European Union, which has remained committed to building an equitable, peaceful and prosperous Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Sweden has shared the road with Bosnia and Herzegovina on its journey. During the war, Sweden offered refuge to many Bosnian refugees. Some returned after the war to rebuild their country, while others remained and have enriched our society, including on the football field. We have contributed personnel to the United Nations Protection Force, the Implementation Force, the Stabilization Force and, most recently, the European Union-led peacekeeping force (EUFOR) Althea.

Sweden's Foreign Minister Margot Wallström recently visited Bosnia and Herzegovina, where she welcomed progress in the country's EU accession process and reiterated our firm support for Bosnia and Herzegovina's continued EU integration, while underlining the importance of dedicated implementation of the reform agenda, focusing on challenges regarding socioeconomic development, corruption, organized crime and fundamental freedoms. These reforms, including that of the Election Law, need to be pursued in an inclusive and transparent manner in order to be sustained. Minister Wallström urged Bosnia and Herzegovina's political leaders to remain focused on their common goal of a better future for all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, irrespective of party affiliation or ethnicity. While Bosnians will set the pace for their country's EU integration, Sweden will continue to assist, both politically and through our development cooperation.

Looking forward, there are three points that I would like to make.

First, we welcome the relatively calm and stable security situation, as reported by the High Representative. The recurrence of nationalistic rhetoric and incidences of ethnically motivated disputes is of concern, however, particularly in light of regional instability and the weak functionality of the Bosnia and Herzegovina state. All parties should do everything possible to avoid such rhetoric and actions, which undermine the reform process.

Secondly, the Dayton Accords provide a framework for peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The unity of the country is crucial to its further development. It is important that efforts towards continued reconciliation and an inclusive society be supported. In that regard, crimes committed during the war, including sexual and gender-based violence, should be addressed. Impunity threatens stability and social cohesion, making reconciliation more difficult.

Thirdly, as stability continues to be strengthened, there is a need for a discussion on the reconfiguration of the international presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

including the phasing out of the executive mandate of EUFOR Althea, to ensure stronger national ownership and responsibility. For that reason, we welcome the strategic review of the mandate of EUFOR Althea this autumn, which will serve as an important basis for evaluation of the continued mandate for the mission.

Finally, as EU High Representative Federica Mogherini said in the Chamber only last week (see S/PV.7935), the countries of the Western Balkans, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, have made impressive steps forward towards peace, regional cooperation and economic growth. The European Union has been instrumental in these efforts by creating a European perspective. That is not in doubt. By continuing the path of reform, the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina will take their place in a Union of over 500 million people committed to prosperity, peace, stability and equality for all its citizens.

Mr. Vitrenko (Ukraine): I thank High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina Inzko for his important briefing and assure him of Ukraine's full support for his activities. In the current circumstances of political instability and internal tensions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, his role and leadership have become even more important.

Ukraine aligns itself with the statement to be deliver on behalf of the European Union (EU).

Despite the Council's efforts and calls on the competent authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina to work actively to consolidate the results of the political process, engage in dialogue to settle their differences and comprehensively implement the Dayton Peace Agreement, the internal situation in that country remains tense, with a risk of further escalation. The need to overcome selfish interests and ethnic divisions and reach the necessary progress in the implementation of the 5+2 agenda is as pressing as never before. In that regard, Ukraine condemns the decision of the Republika Srpska authorities to cease all communications and contact with the Office of the High Representatives, as well as their denial of access to official information and documents. I would like to underline that such actions violate the General Framework Agreement for Peace and the relevant Security Council resolutions, and are therefore unacceptable.

Unfortunately, existing differences in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not unique in the Balkans. Political tensions are becoming the new normal in the whole region. Two days ago, the Council discussed Kosovo (see S/PV.7940). In the past few months we have witnessed tensions and even an attempted coup d'état in the Balkans. Those developments all demonstrate that the shift from a post-conflict to a pre-conflict environment in the region is, unfortunately, still possible.

Of course, the problems and challenges of each country are very different and sometimes incomparable but their roots are rather similar. Quite often, internal tensions are stoked by certain external players, who stir up instability in the Balkans to reverse European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the region and to keep the Balkan States in the imagined sphere of influence. It is an irresponsible policy to conduct in a region that is as complex as the Balkans.

I recall the Council's discussion before and after the adoption of resolution 2315 (2016) in November 2016. Ukraine and many other Council members then strongly condemned the holding of a so-called referendum by the authorities of Republika Srpska, which was in clear contravention of the final and binding decisions of the Constitutional Court. Despite that condemnation and calls for restraint, as well as an annulment of the results of the so-called referendum by Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court, the Republika Srpska authorities continued their provocative actions, violating the General Framework Agreement for Peace. Such actions include the "Republika Srpska Day" celebrations, with the participation of the army's Third Infantry Regiment, the adoption of the law on "Republika Srpska Day", divisive rhetoric and threats of cessation, rejection of the authority of the High Representative and many others.

During the negotiations on resolution 2315 (2016), many Council members, including Ukraine, insisted on the inclusion of condemnation of the so-called referendum, as that would have sent a strong and clear signal to the authorities of the Republika Srpska. That did not happen due to opposition by the Russian Federation. Why was that? In the light of the recent developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the answer is obvious. The failure to take resolute consolidated steps against separatist actions by the leaders of the Republika Srpska challenges the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina and may lead to the destabilization of the Balkans. It would thus would punch another big hole in the infamous instability belt. Ukraine joins the High Representative's call and underscores that the entities

have no right to secede from Bosnia and Herzegovina and that the General Framework Agreement for Peace guarantees the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the constitutional position of the entities.

We are encouraged that, despite the negative developments, during the reporting period we also witnessed substantial progress by Bosnia and Herzegovina on its path to European and Euro-Atlantic integration. In particular, I commend the adoption of the long overdue defence review and the signing of the protocol on the adoption of the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union. We also look forward to the EU Commission opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU membership application and hope that it will attain the status of a candidate country in the near future.

Ukraine commends the European Union-led peacekeeping force Althea for its efforts to enable the security forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina to operate in an independent manner and to participate in building a peaceful society. We look forward to a strategic review of the issue by the European Union.

It is important to continue efforts to implement the reform agenda, which includes socioeconomic issues, the rule of law and public administration reforms. Of equal significance is to demonstrate progress in the functioning of the judiciary, including through the implementation of the relevant Constitutional Court decisions and the fight against corruption, organized crime, radicalization and terrorism. Such progress is essential for the further stability and development of Bosnia and Herzegovina and of the whole region.

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia takes note of the report (S/2017/379,annex) presented by the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Valentin Inzko.

Once again, Bolivia reaffirms its full support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. We call upon all parties to support and implement the Dayton Peace Accords as the legal basis that could pave the way for stability and the peaceful settlement of differences between the parties, with a view to achieving lasting peace.

We also take note of the work of High Representative Inzko and we encourage him to continue his efforts in fulfilling his mandate, according to principles of transparency and impartiality, through an inclusive dialogue that takes into account the approaches and opinions of all actors involved, in accordance with the Dayton Peace Accords.

In that regard, Bolivia urges the parties to continue to work for the good of their country and the welfare of its constituent peoples, who control their own future and are fully sovereign in their decisions. We call on them to continue their joint efforts to foster dialogue and the peaceful settlement of disputes, in order to advance respect for human rights, cooperation and economic and social development. Similarly, we also encourage the parties to step up their efforts in the implementation of the 5+2 agenda, as a requirement for the closure of the Office of the High Representative.

Finally, given the complex situation in the region, we would like to urge the international community to pay attention to the concerns of all parties involved, with a neutral and equitable approach to avoid repeating errors of the past, while supporting and encouraging the development and well-being of this brotherly country.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina for his briefing.

France aligns itself with the statement that will be delivered shortly on behalf of the European Union.

More than 20 years after the Dayton-Paris Agreement was signed, it continues to be the key to institutional stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The unanimous adoption in November last year of resolution 2315 (2016) served to underscore that all the members of the Security Council share the same cardinal principles with regard to Bosnia and Herzegovina. It also recalled the urgent need for everyone to abide by the principles and institutions set up by the Dayton-Paris Agreement and respect the desires of all of the country's stakeholders with regard to the European Union, as well expressing support for the presence of the European Union-led peacekeeping force Althea, which, for the time being, has an executive mandate.

The unity of the Council on that common basis conveys a message of peace to a region that remains fragile, as the past few months have shown. It reflects the fact that the international community agrees to

support the independence and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which cannot be called into question by any one of its entities, and to respect the choices made by the country, provided that they are in line with international law and the framework established by the peace agreements.

In that regard, we are deeply concerned about the various developments that in recent months have revived tensions among the communities and brought memories of past differences back to the fore. First, a referendum was organized in Republika Srpska on the issue of a national day. The vote was held in violation of two judgments of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose decisions are binding and final under both the Bosnian Constitution and the Peace Agreement. The question of respect for the rule of law is therefore a major issue. We also lament the tensions surrounding the recent filing of an appeal for review of the 2007 ruling of the International Court of Justice. Political leaders must act within the framework of national institutions and their respective functions. The International Court of Justice dismissed the appeal because it found that that had not been the case.

In general, we call for greater vigilance with regard to any initiative that is likely to create new divisions in the country. We once again urge all parties to cooperate with the institutions mentioned in the Peace Agreement, namely, the Bosnian Constitutional Court, the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and the Office of the High Representative. We expect that the High Representative will focus his efforts on facilitating a peaceful daily dialogue among the different communities and entities.

It is more important than ever that the political leaders grasp the full extent of their responsibilities. The failure to adopt the necessary measures for the granting of International Monetary Fund assistance is a cause for concern in that regard. We therefore call on all stakeholders to abandon their divisive rhetoric and political games. The time has come to focus on the implementation of the economic and social reforms, which are the crux of the common aspirations of all the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, regardless of their community of origin.

However, despite that fragile situation, we remain convinced that the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is moving towards normalization. Without calling into question the founding principles of the Dayton-Paris Agreement, our objective for the upcoming years is to develop the international presence so that it is fully adapted to the realities of the day. In particular, consideration as to reconfiguring the Office of the High Representative must also continue.

France welcomes the fact that the European perspective is today the main engine for developing and strengthening the country. In that regard, we welcome the many positive developments in the past few months in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the areas of reform and European integration. The official handing over to the Bosnian authorities of the questionnaire to initiate the European Commission's consideration of Bosnia and Herzegovina's candidacy for European Union membership is certainly one such positive development. That is taking place in a context in which the prospect of European integration is receiving massive support on the part of the Bosnian population and enjoys unanimity among the institutions, from the Presidency to the cantons and the entities, which we welcome.

In that context, the European Union will continue now more than ever to help the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina in implementing reforms that fulfil the people's aspirations. The reform agenda is central in that respect. While much remains to be done, we are pleased that initial concrete results have already been achieved. As to the questionnaire, we attach particular importance to demonstrating that the European coordination mechanism is fully functional.

Lastly, as has been mentioned here, the European Union-led stabilization force Althea will also continue its activities and will adapt to the changing security situation on the ground in order to allow the Bosnian security forces to operate autonomously and to participate in consolidating a peaceful and forward-looking society. It will be the subject of a strategic review in autumn by the European Union, which will guide its work in the years to come.

Twenty-one years after the horror of the war and 25 years after the start of the conflict, Bosnia and Herzegovina is moving in the right direction, with the support of the European Union and its other partners. The responsibility of the international community, and especially of the Council, is to encourage Bosnia and Herzegovina along this path so that it finally turns the page on the divisions of the past.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): First, let me thank, Mr. Valentin Inzko, High Representative

for Bosnia and Herzegovina, for the detailed report (S/2017/379, annex) he has just presented to us. We reaffirm our full support to him and invite all the parties to cooperate with him in good faith.

More than 20 years after the signing of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, known as the Dayton-Paris Agreement, Bosnia and Herzegovina continues, despite its pitfalls, its progress towards reunification and building a nation.

Our statement today, like the one we delivered here in the Chamber six months ago (see S/PV.7803), is centred around the political, economic and institutional dimensions in Bosnia Herzegovina.

At the political level, progress has certainly been made with the adoption, in November 2016, of the defence review document for the country's integration into NATO, but also the agreement and official signing of the protocol on the adaptation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement. However, we must recognize that the period covered by the report also saw a resurgence of tensions among Bosnian, Croat and Serb communities. It was marked in particular by nationalist rhetoric and a spiralling of activities — to the point that the Dayton Agreement, which put an end to a terrible war in the heart of Europe, now seems to be fragile, if not questioned. The country's nation-building requires an climate of serenity and open dialogue among all communities and entities of the State, in strict compliance with the provisions of the Dayton Agreement and the Constitution and the laws of the country, which are the guarantee for safeguarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

During the period under review, even if the country could not fulfil its commitments within the time frame of the International Monetary Fund, Bosnia and Herzegovina continued to benefit from the support and assistance provided by that financial institution, which we welcome. Similarly, the economic progress in the country, which we welcomed when we discussed the previous report (S/2016/911, annex), needs to be strengthened to promote harmonious development, the country's stability and the well-being of its people. We therefore call on the three ethnic groups to cooperate even more closely and to further develop the common will to live together in a stable, strong State that has a voice in the community of nations.

As is stated in the report of the High Representative, the presence in the country of the European Union's military mission, with an executive mandate, is still needed insofar as it enables his Office and other international community actors to carry out their respective mandates and to reassure citizens from all ethnic groups as to security in their daily lives.

Combating terrorism is one of the challenges that Bosnia and Herzegovina is facing now in a context in which the return of foreign fighters and complex migratory flows represent added risks to the security of the country and the region. It goes without saying that tangible results cannot be achieved in this struggle without strengthening cooperation at all levels among both State authorities and ethnic groups in the country. It is therefore important to effectively implement the 2015-2030 plan drawn up for that purpose.

Senegal calls upon the international community, in the context of the reform agenda, to continue to support the efforts of Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to help it become more resilient in the face of the socioeconomic problems that it must nevertheless have to tackle. The same applies to strengthening the country's security forces so that they can overcome the strategic and operational gaps in an environment where the terrorist threat remains.

Finally, I would like to encourage the international community, first of all the Council, to maintain its commitment and current level of cooperation in addressing the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to safeguard the positive momentum the country has experienced in the more than two decades since the signing of the Dayton-Paris Accords.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina Valentin Inzko for his briefing.

China respects the independence, sovereignty, national unity and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the choice of the Bosnian people in determining their country's future. We support the efforts of Bosnian people of all ethnicities to live harmoniously and seek common development. We welcome the effort of the country to promote national reconciliation and economic and social development and strengthen the rule of law. We note that the country is still faces challenges in its pursuit of national stability and social development. We hope that Bosnian people of all ethnicities will work actively to consolidate the

political and social progress achieved thus far, engage in dialogue to settle their differences, comprehensively implement the Dayton Peace Agreement and continue to strive for greater progress in all areas so that they may share in the peace dividend.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is an important country in the Balkans. Its stability and development, as well as harmonious coexistence among all ethnic groups, is in the interests of the international community in general, and of the States of the region in particular. The international community should pay attention to the views of all the parties concerned and take a balanced and prudent approach to the country's issues, while also heeding the concerns of all the parties concerned.

China welcomes the efforts by High Representative Inzko to promote the political process. We hope that, in accordance with his mandate, he will continue to play a constructive role in promoting the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement. We also hope that the European Union military mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina will continue to work with the relevant parties to play a positive role in maintaining security and stability in the country. China is ready to work with the international community as a whole and will continue to contribute to the achievement of lasting peace, stability and development in the country.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): I would like to begin by thanking the High Representative for the Implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Valentin Inzko, for his comprehensive briefing on his latest report (S/2017/379, annex) concerning the implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As this is the first time that we we speak on the issue, we would like to affirm our support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We would also like to welcome the signing of the protocol on the adaptation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union (EU), which took place during the reporting period. We believe that progress demonstrates the country's commitment to the EU integration process and offers far-reaching, long-term and positive contributions to the stability and prosperity of the country and the region at large. We also take note of the continued exchange of visits by high-level officials and political leaders of the countries in the region, which, in our view, will strengthen good-neighbourly relations and enhanced cooperation in the Western Balkans.

We are nevertheless concerned about some of the reported developments that undermine the political stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In particular, we take note of the continued deterioration of the rule of law, including actions that challenge the constitutional order and integrity of the State-level judiciary system in the country. In that regard, the authorities and political leaders should fully respect the decision of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is our hope that the ruling issued by the Constitutional Court on the review of the country's election law will be implemented while taking into account the equality and interests of all constituents. It is important that all parties refrain from any provocative statements and actions that could undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Respecting the rule of law and the authority of State institutions, which are established under the Dayton Peace Agreement, is fundamental for the State-building process in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Hence, there is a need for all parties to demonstrate a serious political commitment to the matter.

We also take note of the political crisis and stalemate that occurred within the Presidency and Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina over the reporting period. We believe that such a paralysis in the normal functioning of State institutions serves the interests of no one. We therefore urge all parties to resolve their political differences amicably and to work constructively towards reconciliation and actions that safeguard the interests of their citizens.

In conclusion, we would like to express our full support to the High Representative and his Office in the discharge of the mandate and in monitoring the implementation of the civilian aspect of the Dayton Peace Agreement. We call upon parties to extend the necessary cooperation, which is vital to the work of the High Representative. We also recognize the vital role played by the EU military mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, EUFOR ALTHEA, in maintaining safety and stability in the country.

Mr. Kawamura (Japan): I thank the High Representative for the Implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Inzko, for his informative briefing. Japan appreciates the High

Representative's ongoing contributions to peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Japan fully supports efforts by the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina to join NATO and the European Union (EU). Progress in such efforts is conducive to lasting peace and stability in the country and in the Western Balkans. We particularly welcome the application for EU membership in February last year and the adoption of the defence review by the Presidential Council last November. Japan strongly supports further efforts by the central Government as well as by the two entities.

Nevertheless, we are disappointed by ethnically divisive actions, even 22 years after the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement. The leaders of every ethnic group must pursue the broader national interests, as opposed to more narrow concerns. The current political dysfunction at all levels in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the attempted request for a revision of the 2007 International Court of Justice' judgment is deeply regrettable.

Japan has provided support to reconciliation efforts among ethnic groups since the end of the conflict. In partnership with the private sector, Japan is conducting a project in Mostar for children of different ethnic backgrounds to learn sports together. Children are the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and we very much hope that they will understand the critical importance of cooperation, irrespective of their ethnic origin, through soccer and other sports. An agricultural project has also been carried out in view of supporting reconciliation and economic self-reliance for citizens in Srebrenica, who have taken steps to live side by side in peace while overcoming difficulties. Moreover, Japan will also continue to assist with demining activities in order to ensure the safety of every citizen.

The international community should bolster reconciliation and efforts to reduce ethnic tensions. The Security Council must speak with one voice in urging dialogue among various ethnic groups. As a member of the Peace Implementation Council, Japan emphasizes neutrality towards different ethnic groups, and will contribute to the implementation of the Peace Agreement. We fully support the efforts of Mr. Inzko and the Office of the High Representative to that end.

Mr. Kandeel (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin by thanking the High Representative for the Implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Valentin Inzko, for his very comprehensive briefing on his latest report (S/2017/379, annex) on the implementation of the Agreement. Egypt fully supports his efforts.

Egypt welcomes the positive developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in particular the improvement in good-neighbourly relations and efforts to join European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. That could help to consolidate security and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina and will lead the country to reforms that will ensure complete integration with the rest of Europe. By way of example, we would mention last November's defence review, the European Commission questionnaire to be completed by various institutions in the country and the signing, last December, of the protocol on adapting the Stabilization and Association Agreement.

However, Egypt is concerned about the worsening of the political situation in the country, with increased political and religious polarization, as a result of the attempt to submit a request for revision of the judgment of the International Court of Justice of 26 February 2007, as well as the activities of Republika Srpska authorities to celebrate "Republika Srpska Day", which contravenes a decision of the Constitutional Court. We would also like to express our concern about the deterioration of the rule of law and the non-respect of Court rulings by Republika Srpska authorities. Egypt believes that will damage the country's cohesion and stability.

Those events are taking place against the backdrop of progress on the five objectives and two conditions — the 5+2 plan — being delayed as a result of various challenges and secessionist calls on the part of certain political parties in the Serbian entity, which represents a danger for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina and which could have repercussions not only for the country but also for the entire region. We call upon all political leaders to overcome their narrow political interests and advance the national interests of the people.

Finally, Egypt reaffirms that the Dayton Accords remain the framework for peace and the cornerstone for institutional stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We also reaffirm the importance of respecting the unity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, its stability, territorial integrity, its Constitution and all the rulings of its courts by all parties in order to build stability in the country.

Egypt calls on all factions in Bosnia and Herzegovina to address those challenges and underscores the importance of everyone working together to fully implement the 5+2 plan.

Egypt urges coexistence among all communities and religious groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Only through serious efforts to embrace the concept of peaceful coexistence and political consensus will the country succeed in consolidating peace and speeding up the reform process, which must go hand in hand with genuine international and regional support for those efforts.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity as Permanent Representative of Uruguay.

I thank the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Valentin Inzko, for his detailed briefing.

As we have indicated on previous occasions, Uruguay adheres to strict respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. In that spirit, we reaffirm once again our support for the unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Our country attaches the utmost importance to the rule of law and the authority of the institutions arising from the General Framework Agreement for Peace of 1995. Respect for them is part of the path towards stability and harmonious coexistence. We believe that the rulings of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina should be complied with in full. As a general rule, we also believe that politicians must act responsibly and constructively in order to achieve national objectives that benefit the entire country, such as economic development and the reforms needed for stabilization. Along those lines, the international community must continue to support the implementation of the 1995 Comprehensive Framework Agreement for Peace as a way to settle differences among the three communities.

The stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina is an asset, not just for the country but for the region as a whole. Equality of rights, duties and guarantees is a fundamental assumption of societies. Respect for each community and the harmonious integration of minorities, as well as their adequate representation, lead to a stable and positive political environment. We condemn ethnocentric discourse, divisive and belligerent rhetoric and acts that offend other communities or the victims of war. We must continue to work to leave behind the bitterness that is the product of a conflict that was an affront to humankind and represented one of the darkest chapters in the history of the region and the world.

Bosnia and Herzegovina should focus on the goals shared by all communities. We note with interest the progress made towards the country's integration in the European Union and in improving its regional relations. In that context, the resolution of issues related to defence and State property, fiscal sustainability and the strengthening of the rule of law are of particular relevance. We also appreciate the work being carried out on the ground by the Office of the High Representative for the Implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina and by Operation Althea of the European Union-led peacekeeping force in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which represents a guarantee for political and social stability in the country.

Finally, I would like to reiterate Uruguay's desire and commitment to ensuring that Bosnia and Herzegovina becomes stable and sovereign, with inclusion for all of its citizens and a focus on the common good.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Vukašinović (Bosnia and Herzegovina): At the outset, let me congratulate you, Mr. President, on our assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of May. I wish you and your delegation every success.

We welcome the presence in the Council today of Mr. Valentin Inzko, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, and have taken note of his report (S/2017/379, annex) on the situation in the country, which covers the period from 22 October 2016 to 21 April 2017.

Bosnia and Herzegovina further intensified its efforts during the reporting period in the implementation of the reform agenda and continued to work vigorously to implement the socioeconomic reforms necessary for integration into the European Union (EU). Bosnia and Herzegovina's authorities at all levels have synchronized their activities as they prepare answers for the European Commission questionnaire.

In December 2016, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the European Union signed the protocol on the adaptation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement. The signing of the protocol represents an important step forward on Bosnia and Herzegovina's path towards joining the European Union. The protocol begins a new stage of trade cooperation between Bosnia and Herzegovina and EU member States. In addition, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Denis Zvizdić, in his capacity as a Chair of the EU-Bosnia and Herzegovina Stabilization and Association Council, signed a decision on foreign trade that will simplify trade with the EU and the wider region. Specifically, the decision replaced bilateral rules of origin with preferential rules of origin, in accordance with the Regional Convention on pan-Euro-Mediterranean preferential rules of origin. We would like to express our appreciation to the European Union for its unwavering commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina's membership in the EU. Bosnia and Herzegovina has also enhanced its cooperation with NATO.

One of the most important goals of Bosnia and Herzegovina's foreign policy is the advancement of friendly and constructive cooperation among the countries of the region. The perspective of integration into the European Union remains a crucial factor not only in regional cooperation but also in the stability of the Western Balkans. Cooperation within the framework of the Berlin process, which provides assets for traffic and energy infrastructure, is particularly important for regional development.

Countries of the Western Balkans continue to hold regular meetings at the highest level that generate a positive political environment. At the last meeting of Western Balkans Prime Ministers, held in Sarajevo on 16 and 17 March, the States' Prime Ministers expressed their full commitment to the prospect of EU accession and welcomed the European Council's unequivocal support in that regard. They stressed that firm and credible EU prospects continue to drive the transformation and modernization of the region through political and economic reforms.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has intensified its efforts to strengthen the rule of law in several key areas. In the reporting period, Bosnia and Herzegovina continued to fulfil its international obligations with regard to countering terrorism and violent extremism. Bosnia and Herzegovina, in accordance with provisions of its amended penal code, continues to prosecute terrorist fighters as well as those facilitating their recruitment.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's judicial and security institutions have been implementing their strategy for preventing and combating terrorism. In addition to security measures, the strategy for preventive activities for de-radicalization carried out by national stakeholders, such as religious communities, educational institutions, civil society organizations and the media. In the same period, Bosnia and Herzegovina's rule of law and security institutions have made progress in combating organized crime, corruption and money-laundering.

As for prosecuting war crimes in domestic courts, we would like to reiterate that fighting impunity at the local level is vital for Bosnia and Herzegovina as a complex and multinational State. In that context, implementing the National War Crimes Strategy, regardless of the national or religious origin of perpetrators or victims, is essential to reconciliation and long-term stability.

With regard to the economic situation, I would stress that Bosnia and Herzegovina's economy, like other economies in the region, has been affected by the global economic slowdown. Nevertheless, its economy grew at a solid pace in 2016. In comparison to 2015, Bosnia and Herzegovina's economy has grown 2.8 per cent and its exports have increased by 3 per cent. The inflation rate was -1.1 per cent, which means that in 2016 consumer prices fell slightly by comparison with the previous year.

The international migrant crisis still constitutes a significant challenge to the States of the region and their economies. Since the closure of the Western Balkans route, we have witnessed a significant decrease in the refugee and migrant flow through our region. However, the States of the region continue to be on the forefront of the international migrant crisis. In that context, I note that Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities have undertaken a set of comprehensive measures in the humanitarian, security and other spheres. Bosnia and Herzegovina has implemented its strategy on migration and asylum, through its plan of action for the 2016-2020 period. That document specifies our policy on migration and asylum, which is consistent with the highest European and international standards.

The security situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has remained peaceful and calm, as regularly reflected

in the reports of the European Union-led peacekeeping force (EUFOR) Althea mission, as well as in the relevant Council resolutions. We stress that Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a host country, has had respectable and fruitful cooperation with EUFOR Althea, particularly in capacity-building and the training of the armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is actively contributing to international peace and security by providing military and police personnel to United Nations peacekeeping missions, currently deploying 42 peacekeepers worldwide.

Finally, we would like to express the readiness of Bosnia and Herzegovina's authorities to continue their work in securing a better and prosperous future for its citizens. In that regard, we thank our international partners for supporting us on that path.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Vale De Almeida: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its 28 member States.

The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania, as well as Ukraine, align themselves with this statement.

I join others in welcoming High Representative Valentin Inzko back to the Security Council and in assuring him of the European Union's continued support. I also welcome our colleague, the Permanent Representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and thank him for his statement.

(*spoke in French*)

The year 2016 was very good to Bosnia and Herzegovina, with progress towards reform and European integration. Bosnia and Herzegovina formally applied for accession to the European Union in February 2016. On 20 September of the same year, the Council instructed the European Commission to review that candidature.

At the request of the Council, Mr. Hahn, Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, presented a questionnaire to the Sarajevo authorities on 9 December, 2016, to enable the Commission to deliver an opinion on the country's preparations. That questionnaire of 3,242 questions will provide a comprehensive overview of the country's constitutional, political, economic and social landscape. It will also be a first test for the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina of their ability to work together, throughout the country.

On the basis of the replies provided, the European Commission will present an assessment and recommendations to the EU Council concerning not only the candidate status of Bosnia and Herzegovina but also the accession negotiations. Those will include the priority areas on which Bosnia and Herzegovina will need to focus if it is to move forward towards European membership.

(*spoke in English*)

After years of stagnation, these positive developments are the result of the reform agenda for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2015-2018, which Governments of State and entity levels have crafted in the framework of the renewed approach of the EU integration process, and which since 2014 have prioritized social and economic reforms. The new EU approach has yielded results, but the implementation of the reforms has had limited success and the sociopolitical outlook remains uncertain. It is time for sincere reform efforts. Without them, an increase in radicalism, socioeconomic problems and nationalistic tensions could result in long-term instability.

Bosnia and Herzegovina initially made good progress, and the pace of reforms should not decrease. We therefore expect continued and effective implementation of this reform agenda. Bosnia and Herzegovina has entered a phase in which it faces difficult decisions regarding the economy and public administration. Success in these reforms can bring significant benefits for citizens and help the country advance in the EU integration process. The much-improved economic growth in Bosnia and Herzegovina — more than 3 per cent in 2016 — and the growth in private-sector jobs are signs that, with the right policies, economic progress is within reach. Thus Bosnia and Herzegovina can make a positive contribution to regional cooperation, which is also an important factor in the country's EU path.

Despite these efforts at economic reform, Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to suffer from agendas driven by constituency interests, which divert attention from much-needed reforms. Controversies are pulling Bosnia and Herzegovina in the wrong direction.

The judiciary should not be instrumentalized to justify the lack of a common vision. It is the responsibility of Bosnia and Herzegovina's political authorities not only to forge a country-wide agenda but also to comply with judicial decisions once they have been issued. The rulings of the Constitutional Court on the election law will have to be addressed in an appropriate manner by the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities. Ensuring the smooth conduct of the general elections, scheduled for autumn 2018, is key.

But, as I said, 2017 should be used to focus on and resolve pending issues that present a challenge to the socioeconomic environment and democratic institutions.

I would also like to encourage the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina to move forward its European agenda and contribute to establishing a democratic and well-functioning society in which the equality of Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs and all other citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina is ensured.

The EU reiterates its unequivocal commitment to the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a sovereign and united country. The European Union will continue to use all available instruments to support Bosnia and Herzegovina's stability and progress. The overall security situation has remained relatively calm and stable; however, security is not yet fully entrenched. In that context, the European Union confirms that Operation Althea of the European Union-led peacekeeping force in Bosnia and Herzegovina, through its executive mandate, retains the capability to contribute to the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities' deterrence capacity if the situation so requires, while focusing on capacity-building and training.

As the country's stability continues to strengthen and further progress is achieved in reforms and on the EU path, the European Union looks forward to continuing, in the appropriate forum, discussions with the international community on the possible reconfiguration of the international presence. In that regard, the European Union calls on the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina to pursue the reform agenda and to increase their efforts to meet the outstanding objectives and the conditions for the future closure of the Office of the High Representative.

(*spoke in French*)

To conclude, I should like to say that in the course of the two decades during which the Council has been considering the situation in the country, we have witnessed progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina in many areas — socioeconomic progress as well as advances in the democratic and security areas. Reconciliation among its citizens requires, in turn, greater efforts for continued reform and for inclusivity.

I reiterate what I said yesterday: the doors of the European Union are open, and it is incumbent on the political leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina to take the measures necessary to solidify this clear prospect and to join the European Union.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Croatia.

Mr. Drobnjak (Croatia): Croatia aligns itself with the statement just delivered by the observer of the European Union.

I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

As a signatory to the Dayton Peace Agreement, Croatia bears special responsibility for the stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Croatia is Bosnia and Herzegovina's first European Union (EU) neighbour and trade partner. Relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina are therefore one of Croatia's foreign-policy priorities and its integration into the European Union and NATO our strategic goal.

A stable, peaceful and prosperous Bosnia and Herzegovina where genuine institutional equality among the three constituent peoples and all citizens is guaranteed should play a valuable role as a generator of stability in south-eastern Europe as well as a contributor to the stability of the European Union as a whole.

The European and Euro-Atlantic perspective of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its consequent EU and NATO membership is a goal that Croatia will continue to staunchly support. We see this as the best catalyst for addressing outstanding internal issues as well as a safeguard for further democratization, the strengthening of institutions, and ensuring freedom of the media and an independent judiciary. The implementation of the reform agenda is also vital to achieving this goal.

We have supported the application of Boston and Herzegovina for membership in the European Union. We want to encourage the authorities at all levels of Government to redouble their efforts to submit credible, well-prepared answers to the European Commission's questionnaire, so that we can discuss the candidate

status for Bosnia and Herzegovina as soon as possible. We would like to see Bosnia and Herzegovina catch up with its neighbours in the field of the European integration, and in pursuit of this pivotal goal we shall continue to extend our political, technical and expert support.

In addition, Croatia would like to stimulate greater cross-border cooperation on the part of local and regional self-government units on both sides of the border, which should result in the implementation of joint projects and better use of EU funds. Flexible cross-border cooperation and tangible benefits from EU funds enable people at the local level to feel closer to the EU.

On the Euro-Atlantic front, Bosnia and Herzegovina has achieved concrete results, namely, the adoption of the defence review and a solid record in the registration of defence property, making the activation of the NATO membership action plan plausible and justified.

While progress has been achieved in a number of fields, including the economy, political crises, often repetitive in nature and substance, continue to plague the political landscape of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This has a negative impact on reform-oriented processes and is preventing Bosnia and Herzegovina from moving forward and unleashing all of its potential. The political impasse and divisive rhetoric pose the risk of derailing Bosnia and Herzegovina from the path of much-needed reforms and undermining the very functionality and stability of the country.

Furthermore, we are deeply concerned at the fact that political polarization, intensified by years of economic hardship, is increasing radicalization and extremism within Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially among the younger population. This deterioration fits within the wider context of the challenges facing south-eastern Europe. In that context, we have to put all the tools at our disposal to good use.

Besides socioeconomic reforms and the implementation of the reform agenda, it is of the utmost importance not to lose sight of the political issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As shown by the recent institutional crisis caused by the application for revision of the judgment in the genocide case against Serbia, focus must be maintained, as well, on urgent political questions so as to achieve stability and prevent future internal destabilization.

The most urgent political question is the reform of the Election Law, especially in the light of the decision of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina dated 1 December 2016 and the decision of the Constitutional Court on the city of Mostar. The former decision states that certain provisions of the Election Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina are in contravention to the Bosnian Constitution, since they breach the constitutional principle of the equality of the three constituent peoples — Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs — and their right to legitimate representation.

The reform of the Election Law therefore presents a welcome opportunity to ensure the institutional equality of the three peoples and all citizens, and a chance to leap forward towards political stability and a more integrated country. The refusal to implement the decision of the Constitutional Court on the reform of the Election Law further jeopardizes the fragile stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina, thereby leaving open the space for further political manipulations, which have, as witnessed in the recent past, a destructive impact on the equality of the smallest in number of the three constituent peoples.

Politically dominant actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to reject the implementation of the aforementioned decision of the Constitutional Court, thereby demonstrating their determination and persistence in opposing the realization of the constitutional principle of the equality of the three constituent peoples. We recall that the enjoyment of rights emanating from that principle represents the very foundation on which Bosnia and Herzegovina is built as a State and therefore should be seen as conditio sine qua non.

In accordance with its responsibilities and obligations as a signatory to the Dayton Agreement and as a country that shares a 1,000-kilometre land border with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia cannot remain silent and inert while witnessing the continuation of such destabilizing policies. We urge all who are genuinely interested in the democratic stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina to take action on the prolongation of a situation in which decisions of the central judicial body are not obeyed or implemented.

The question of institutional stability is crucial to the capability of Bosnia and Herzegovina to efficiently and promptly fulfil its obligations arising from the process of European integration and to fight political

radicalism and elements of religious extremism. Croatia is ready to assist Bosnia and Herzegovina in improving its institutional and administrative capacity and in meeting the requirements on the path to the integration in the EU. Furthermore, we encourage our neighbour to proceed without delay with the reform of the judiciary in order to strengthen its independence, professionalism, accountability and impartiality. It is also important that Bosnia and Herzegovina assume ownership of its judiciary institutions. The implementation of all outlined and much-needed reforms will strengthen the country from within and give impetus to everybody in Bosnia and Herzegovina — all constituent peoples and all citizens — to move forward on the European and Euro-Atlantic path.

Let me finish by quoting from the recent joint statement of the Justice and Peace Commissions (Justitia et Pax) of the Bishops Conferences and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia, which took place earlier this month:

> "Today the Catholics in Bosnia and Herzegovina are the most endangered part of the Catholic Church on the entire European continent".

The Commissions appealed to the international community to extend more efficient assistance to the country as to ensure that genuine and real equality of the three constituent peoples — Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs — and all other citizens is achieved in the whole territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a supporter and advocate of Bosnia and Herzegovina's stability, prosperity and territorial integrity, Croatia echoes this appeal.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Serbia.

Mr. Milanović (Serbia): Before I begin, I would like to thank High Representative Inzko for his briefing.

In all our statements in the Security Council on this topic, regional stability and the development of all-round cooperation with Serbia's closest neighbours have been accentuated as its most important foreign policy priorities. These issues, we believe, should continue to be the fulcrum of attention of the countries of the Western Balkans and South-East Europe as they plan their activities and take concrete actions. In that context and to those ends, my country sees Bosnia and Herzegovina as a key partner.

The European Union is facing many challenges and its enlargement may not be at the forefront of its ongoing endeavours. Yet the continuation of the process of enlargement and the region's steady progress towards reforms are needed by the countries of the Western Balkans, perhaps more than ever before. We therefore look forward to each and every step made by Bosnia and Herzegovina in that direction as it brings us closer to our common European future. As a candidate country, Serbia considers that the European integration by Bosnia and Herzegovina is an important process and is ready to render its unyielding help and all-round support.

Strengthening comprehensive regional cooperation in the Western Balkans is an indispensable part of its European integration. We are convinced that ample possibilities exist for cooperation between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and stand ready and willing to step up our efforts in promoting the all-important task of furthering such cooperation. In order to do so, it is necessary that our two countries undertake realizing our common interests as that provides the most solid and reliable basis for a better future of the citizens of both Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Commitments to promoting stability and all-round cooperation and avowed readiness to undertake reforms conducive to the process of European integration feature prominently on the political agendas of the Governments of our region. Yet we have borne witness to various recent trends that cause unnecessary political tensions and send messages reminiscent of the troublesome past, while a constructive approach has often been pushed aside. They have marked the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the relations between its entities and constituent peoples and, by extension, the situation in the region.

My country firmly believes that its active policy of promoting reconciliation in the Western Balkans and strengthening good-neighbourly relations is rightful and correct. We must continue to promote political, legal and economic reforms, strengthen the rule of law and institutions, and pledge allegiance to European values as the only avenue to a more prosperous and stable region.

I also emphasize on this occasion that respect for territorial integrity is an international standard and a principle that must always be honoured and upheld. The past of the Western Balkans makes it imperative

for us to accept the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States as the basis of a different and better future. In accordance with the provisions of the Dayton Peace Agreement, therefore, Serbia has been consistently and lastingly committed to the maintenance of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Dayton Peace Agreement was signed more than 20 years ago in order to bring an end to the tragic conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As its guarantor, Serbia considers that the Agreement continues to be a condition sine qua non for peace and stability. Since we are called on to safeguard peace and stability, we must therefore keep the Agreement. Genuine reconciliation is needed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, all the more so as differing views and other challenges are becoming increasingly evident in the region.

Over the past two decades, it has been said and demonstrated many times that dialogue and agreements are the best and safest ways to address the outstanding issues affecting relations between the country's entities and constituent peoples. We believe that is the only way that we can ensure that potential solutions are acceptable and implementable as they help to build confidence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Serbia considers outstanding issues — such as the observance of Republika Srpska Day, the functioning of shared institutions, election laws and others that are the focus of differences between the entities — to be internal questions for the country.

We therefore support an active dialogue within Bosnia and Herzegovina as the right way to find solutions acceptable to all and to build confidence. It will help strengthen cooperation, transparency and effectiveness in the shared institutions, promote confidence between the entities and have a positive influence on the situation in the region. Without it, there may be efforts to resort to unilateral acts, such as the attempt to institute legally unfounded proceedings aimed at revising the judgment of the International Court of Justice in the case concerning *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro)*. The Court's rejection of the request confirms the need for conducting political dialogue aimed at addressing disagreements and solving outstanding issues to the benefit of all the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Serbia has given special attention to continuing and intensifying its political dialogue with Bosnia and Herzegovina, which we see as one of the most important elements promoting general good relations. In that context, I should point out that Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia, has visited Bosnia and Herzegovina this year on two occasions, in March and April. He took part in a meeting of the Prime Ministers of the Western Balkans on 16 March, convened to help prepare for the Western Balkans Summit, to be held within the Berlin process initiative in Trieste in July. In Sarajevo, the Prime Minister emphasized once again the importance of regional stability, strengthening economic cooperation, free trade and interlinkages, and the European prospects of the Western Balkans. On 3 and 4 April Mr. Vučić also visited Mostar for the opening of the twentieth International Economic Fair, where he met with high representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina and discussed regional stability, promoting cooperation and realizing regional projects.

On 10 April, Ms. Zorana Mihajlović, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Civil Engineering, Transport and Infrastructure of the Republic of Serbia, visited Srebrenica, where she commissioned the construction of a kindergarten financed by a donation from the Serbian Government. The children of Srebrenica, Bosniak and Serb alike — the town's future — will attend the kindergarten together. Mr. Denis Zvizdić, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, visited Belgrade on 21 January. In his discussions with Serbian Government officials, the two countries recommitted to promoting peace and stability and furthering cooperation, including on joint infrastructure projects connecting the two countries, such as new bridges, highways and railways. On 13 May, Mr. Igor Crnadak, Foreign Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the representative of a partner country, visited Serbia to open the eighty-fourth Agricultural Fair in Novi Sad, alongside Mr. Ivica Dačić, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia.

Serbia continues to be interested in promoting economic cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina. Trade between the two countries is growing, with a 5.8 per cent increase in 2016 over the previous year. Serbia's total investment of €900 million in Bosnia and Herzegovina makes it one of its biggest investors. We believe that the creation of ties between our peoples and economies should be a priority for Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, just as they are for the other

countries of the Western Balkans, especially in the areas of infrastructure, energy, tourism, free trade and elsewhere. We simply must continue to promote projects that bring us together. We trust and believe that Bosnia and Herzegovina and our other neighbours are ready to embark on joint and responsible efforts to achieve all our goals, creating a better future and avoiding the pitfalls of the past.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.